

Griffith Park Wildlife Connectivity Study

Project Update, March 2012

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Project Goals

This scientific project uses remotely-triggered cameras to study the movement of large and medium-sized mammals to and from Griffith Park and the surrounding open space. This is the first project to evaluate movement of wide-ranging species through potential corridors that may connect the Griffith Park region to neighboring natural areas.

Why Study Connectivity?

This area — which forms the eastern end of the Santa Monica Mountains eco-region — is surrounded by highways and other development. These urban features can limit connectivity between habitats, isolating populations of animal species. When animals are unable to cross these urban features, their populations may be prone to inbreeding and loss of genetic diversity. Decreased genetic diversity may increase a population's chance of extinction.

Landscape connectivity is important for the maintenance of natural biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, and requires animal movement across highways and other urban features. By studying the movement of large and medium-sized mammals to and from Griffith Park, we can identify potential corridors that may connect the Griffith Park region to other natural areas.

Project Methods

The project was initiated in July 2011, to run through 2013. Working in cooperation with several landowners in the area, the research is jointly conducted by biologists from Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc. and the USGS Western Ecological Research Center.

The focus is the Griffith Park region of natural areas, at the eastern end of the Santa Monica Mountains eco-region in Los Angeles County, California. Researchers currently use thirteen remote cameras at potential wildlife corridors across highway CA-101/Cahuenga Pass, which divides Griffith Park and contiguous wildlife habitat from the rest of the Santa Monica Mountains. Cameras are motion-activated to record digital images in the immediate field of view. Images are stored on memory cards that researchers periodically collect and download.

Cooperating Organizations

The scientific project is funded by Friends of Griffith Park, a local non-profit organization supported by contributions mainly from local residents. Additional project support comes from USGS. Community partners include the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Caltrans, Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority, as well as private residents in the area.

Project Updates – March 2012

- As of March 2012, up to 13 cameras have logged approximately 1,339 nights since July 2011. Species of medium and large-mammals recorded to date include mountain lion (*Puma concolor*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), as well as various urban species.
- In February 2012, images of a mountain lion were recorded on the east side of Cahuenga Pass, the first known images documenting mountain lion activity east of the Cahuenga Pass within the Santa Monica Mountains eco-region.
- In the near future, camera stations will be added on the east side of Griffith Park to monitor potential connections for wildlife across Interstate-5 towards the Verdugo Mountains.
- These observations are considered preliminary and have not been interpreted; complete findings from the study will be released following analysis and project completion in late 2013.

Project Photos



Left: a mountain lion photographed east of the Cahuenga Pass in February 2012. **Middle:** a bobcat photographed west of the pass in October 2011. **Right:** a mule deer photographed in August 2011.

For More Information About the Research Project, Please Contact:

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